REL SOUTHWEST Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest

REL Southwest Ask A REL Response

March 2021

Question:

What does the research say about the role of exclusionary discipline policies/practices on student achievement?

Response:

Thank you for the question you submitted to our REL Reference Desk. We have prepared the following memo with research references to help answer your question. For each reference, we provide an abstract, excerpt, or summary written by the study's author or publisher. Following an established Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest research protocol, we conducted a search for research reports as well as descriptive study articles on the role of exclusionary discipline policies/practices on student achievement.

We have not evaluated the quality of references and the resources provided in this response. We offer them only for your reference. Also, we searched the references in the response from the most commonly used resources of research, but they are not comprehensive, and other relevant references and resources may exist. References provided are listed in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance. We do not include sources that are not freely available to the requestor.

Research References

Anderson, K. P., Ritter, G. W., & Zamarro, G. (2019). Understanding a vicious cycle: The relationship between student discipline and student academic outcomes. *Educational Researcher, 48*(5), 251–262. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1220624. Retrieved from http://baku8km.khazar.org/bitstream/20.500.12323/4408/1/understanding%20a%20vecious%20cycle.pdf

From the ERIC abstract: "While numerous studies have demonstrated a correlation between exclusionary discipline and negative student outcomes, this relationship is likely confounded by other factors related to the underlying misbehavior or risk of disciplinary referral. Using 10 years of student-level demographic, achievement, and disciplinary data from all K-12 public schools in Arkansas, we find that exclusionary consequences are related to worse academic outcomes (e.g., test scores and grade retention) than less exclusionary consequences, controlling for type of behavioral infraction. However, despite controlling for a robust set of covariates, sensitivity checks demonstrate that the

estimated relationships between consequences and academic outcomes may still be driven by selection bias into consequence type. Implications for policy and practice are discussed."

Arcia, E. (2006). Achievement and enrollment status of suspended students: Outcomes in a large, multicultural school district. *Education and Urban Society, 38*(3), 359–369. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ734969. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249682240

From the ERIC abstract: "There have been outcries in both the academic sector and in the popular press about the high and increasingly rising use of suspensions as a discipline measure. Among the negative consequences noted has been a detrimental impact on the academic achievement of suspended students. This article presents the results of longitudinal retrospective analyses on suspensions, achievement, and long-term enrollment status of students in a large, urban school district. The pre- and postsuspension reading achievements of suspended students were compared to those of a comparison group matched on grade, gender, race, participation in the free/reduced lunch program, and limited English proficiency. Findings indicated that suspended students had substantially lower presuspension achievement than did students in the comparison group, gained considerably less academically throughout 3 years with suspensions, and had high drop-out rates. All patterns were considerably more marked with increases in suspensions and with decreases in achievement."

Balfanz, R., Byrnes, V., & Fox, J. (2014). Sent home and put off-track: The antecedents, disproportionalities, and consequences of being suspended in the ninth grade. *Journal of Applied Research on Children, 5*(2), Article 13, 1–19. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1188519

From the ERIC abstract: "This study is based upon a longitudinal analysis of data for a cohort of 181,897 Florida state students who were first time 9th graders in the 2000-01 school year and follows them trough to high school and post-secondary outcomes. Analysis of 9th grade suspension data finds that black students, students who are economically disadvantaged, and special education students are three demographics subgroups that are disproportionately suspended, both in the frequency of suspensions and the duration in number of school days lost. While poverty and ethnicity are themselves highly correlated, poverty alone does not explain the disproportionate suspension rates amongst black students. Further analyses show that out-of-school suspensions in the 9th grade year are also significantly and negatively correlated to later high school graduation as well as post-secondary enrollment and persistence. Thus demographic disparities in disciplinary incidents serve to further widen any academic achievement gaps. Closer analysis though shows though that disciplinary incidents are interrelated with other of indicators of student disengagement from school, such as course failures and absenteeism. Therefore, policies seeking to address these issues cannot focus on reducing suspensions alone, but must also address student attendance and course passing in a comprehensive and systematic manner."

Hwang, N. (2018). Suspensions and achievement: Varying links by type, frequency, and subgroup. *Educational Researcher, 47*(6), 363–374. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1189786. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325437248

From the ERIC abstract: "Researchers have shown that receiving suspensions is associated with negative educational outcomes. However, existing studies fail to control for unobservable differences between those students who received suspensions and those who did not. In this study, I compare achievement for a given student across school quarters with varying types and levels of suspensions by taking advantage of a unique dataset that measures student achievement at 12 time points across 3 academic years. Results show that multiple suspensions are associated with lower math and English language arts achievement even after controlling for differences between students. Furthermore, I find suggestive evidence that these associations are stronger for students who have an elevated risk of suspensions."

Lacoe, J., & Steinberg, M. P. (2019). Do suspensions affect student outcomes? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 41*(1), 34–62. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1204837

From the ERIC abstract: "Discipline reformers claim that suspensions negatively affect suspended students, while others suggest reforms have unintended consequences for peers. Using student panel data from the School District of Philadelphia, we implement student fixed effects and instrumental variable (IV) strategies to examine the consequences of suspensions for offending students and their peers. A suspension decreases math and reading achievement for suspended students. The effects are robust to IV estimates leveraging a district-wide policy change in suspension use. Suspensions are more salient for students who personally experience suspension than for their peers. Exposure to suspensions for more serious misconduct has very small, negative spillovers onto peer achievement, but does not change peer absences."

Noltemeyer, A. L., Ward, R. M., & Mcloughlin, C. (2015). Relationship between school suspension and student outcomes: A meta-analysis. *School Psychology Review, 44*(2), 224–240. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1141532. Retrieved from https://edsource.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Noltemeyer_Ward_2015_Meta-Analysis.pdf

From the ERIC abstract: "Although the association between school suspension and deleterious outcomes is widely acknowledged, policy and practice need to be informed by an evidence base derived from multiple studies revealing consistent trends. This meta-analysis aims to address this void by examining the degree to which different types of school suspensions (in-school versus out-of-school) are associated with both academic achievement and school dropout, while concurrently examining study or participant characteristics that moderate these relationships. Data sources included peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed studies from 1986-2012 obtained via bibliographic databases. A meta-analysis was conducted on 53 cases from 34 studies. The results revealed a significant inverse relationship between suspensions and achievement, along with a significant positive relationship between suspensions and dropout. Furthermore, study or participant characteristics and type of suspension significantly affected the relationship between suspensions and the outcome variables. Implications for policy, practice, and research are emphasized."

Additional Organizations to Consult

National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments–
https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/

From the website: "The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments is funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Supportive Schools. The Center offers information and technical assistance to states, districts, schools, institutions of higher learning, and communities focused on improving school climate and conditions for learning."

REL Southwest Note: An Educator's Action Planning Guide and PowerPoint presentation, and other resources for addressing the root causes of disparities in school discipline are located here: https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/addressing-root-causes-disparities-school-discipline

University of Nebraska–Lincoln Student Engagement Project–https://k12engagement.unl.edu/

From the website: The University of Nebraska's Student Engagement Project provides "materials to assist educators for school improvement or individual student planning—in order to increase engagement, improve student behavior & academics, and reduce exclusionary discipline & dropout within a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework."

REL Southwest Note: The Student Engagement Project offers several resources on Reducing Exclusionary Discipline for early childhood through K-12 settings here: https://k12engagement.unl.edu/resources-reducing-exclusionary-discipline.

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- exclusionary discipline (student achievement)
- suspension (student achievement)
- in-school suspension (student achievement)
- out-of-school suspension (student achievement)
- zero-tolerance policy (student achievement)

We searched ERIC for relevant, peer-reviewed research references. ERIC is a free online library of more than 1.8 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). Additionally, we searched the What Works Clearinghouse.

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

When we were searching and reviewing resources, we considered the following criteria:

- *Date of the publication:* References and resources published from 2006to present were included in the search and review.
- *Search priorities of reference sources:* Search priority is given to study reports, briefs, and other documents that are published and/or reviewed by IES and other federal or federally funded organizations, academic databases, including ERIC, EBSCO databases, JSTOR database, PsychInfo, PsychArticle, and Google Scholar.
- *Methodology:* The following methodological priorities/considerations were given in the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized control trials, quasi-experiments, correlational studies, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, mixed methods analyses, and so forth; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected, and so forth), study duration, and so forth; and (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, and so forth.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by stakeholders in the Southwest Region (Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest at AIR. This memorandum was prepared by REL Southwest under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-91990018C0002, administered by AIR. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.